

THE SPIRITUAL ISSUES OF THE WAR

OBJECTS:

1. *To provide for readers at home and abroad information concerning the life and thought of the British Churches in wartime.*
2. *To elucidate by news and quotations the spiritual issues at stake in the war.*

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A HISTORIC DOCUMENT OF DUTCH RESISTANCE

We published last week a short reference to a recent protest by the Dutch churches against the flagrant injustice of the Nazi authorities in Holland.

It is interesting to discover that this protest on behalf of outraged justice is not a new thing, but received clear expression in January, 1942, when, as *Vrij Nederland* reveals, the Protestant Church and the Roman Catholic authorities in Holland had a joint interview with the Secretary-General of the Department of Justice. During this interview they requested an audience with the Reichskommissar for the occupied Netherlands territory in order to submit to him their objections.

On February 17th, 1942, the representatives of the Christian churches in the Netherlands had an audience with the Reichskommissar, Seyss Inquart, at which also the Nazi Secretary-General of the Department of Justice and the German Commissar were also present.

The representatives of the Churches assured Reichskommissar Seyss Inquart that they approached him on behalf of the *entire* Christian Church in the Netherlands.

"The history of the Netherlands people," they asserted, "dates from the Eighty Years' war, which was fought for the *freedom of conscience*. The basis of our people's character is Christian. This basis is now being attacked, and present happenings constitute an assault thereon. Therefore the Churches adjure you in the name of God to recognise the distress and to take steps to avert it."

The points which the representatives of the Churches subsequently submitted to the Reichskommissar corresponded with the memorandum which was placed before him

at the end of the audience. This reads as follows:

"In March, 1941, the Protestant Churches sent an address to the college of Secretaries-General, in which they expressed their concern at the state of affairs in the country and the reaction it had on our people, and requested that this should be conveyed to the German authorities, while the Bishops of the Roman Catholic Church on their part repeatedly expressed their concern.

"The Churches feel themselves compelled to focus attention once more on their very serious misgivings with regard to the development of events, which is becoming increasingly clear. The Churches do not intend to enter into questions of politics or international law; they are bound, however, by virtue of the task imposed upon them by Christ to raise their voice also when the principles of justice and mercy which have their root in the Epistle are publicly denied.

"Loyalty to their vocation impels the Churches to speak. Moreover, the Churches would neglect their duty towards the authorities if they, jointly representing by far the greater majority of the population of the country, failed to express their alarm at the ever-increasing feelings and tension caused by the above-mentioned development among the masses.

"Confining themselves to a few symptoms which are a particular source of anxiety to the Churches, they name primarily the almost complete lawlessness. Anyone is liable to be taken prisoner without any definite accusation; to be detained without trial; to be deprived of his liberty for an indefinite period in camps or elsewhere without proper cause or conviction. Mention should further be

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made of the treatment meted out to those of Jewish origin. At present the Churches do not wish to pass an opinion on anti-Semitism, which they reject as being contrary to Christian principles; neither do they wish to enter into arguments with regard to political measures taken against the Jews in general. They wish to confine themselves to the fact that in the course of 1941 numerous Jews were imprisoned and transported elsewhere; official communications regarding the alarmingly high rate of mortality among those deported have since been received. The Churches would grossly fail in their duty if they did not call on the authorities to check these measures. Christian charity demands it.

"The Churches would further draw your attention to the fact that the National Socialist outlook is only favoured by a small number of people of the Netherlands, but that it is being forced by the authorities on the entire population.

"Having their foundation in Christ, the Churches reject this outlook in principle. But this point they do not wish to discuss. They only oppose the fact that this ideology and outlook are being forced on the people by the authorities. This becomes clear—to mention only a few points—from the official regulations regarding the administration of justice and education, the rights of societies and the press. It becomes increasingly impossible for the Christian to live according to his principles; again and again he is torn between the choice of co-operating in things which his conscience forbids him to do, or exposing his family and himself to fatal consequences.

"The Churches feel themselves attacked, but this is not the primary reason for their appeal to you.

"They approach you because three of the principles of our society—justice, charity and freedom of conscience—which have their root in the Christian faith are being attacked. If such exalted values are jeopardised, it is the duty of the Church to protest, even to the authorities."

Briefly summarised, the reply from the Reichskommissar read as follows:

It was disappointing that the Churches had still not understood that Germany was waging a struggle for Christianity against Bolshevism. Charity was practised as far as possible, even in the case of prisoners. Imprisonment was often for the good of the prisoners themselves, as otherwise they would continue on their chosen path and become

guiltier still. The occupied countries did not yet realise how fortunate they were in comparison with the soldiers at the Eastern front. As regards the Jews, there could be no question of "charity" but *at the most* of justice. The Jewish problem would be solved by the Germans themselves, and in no respect would any discrimination be made between Jew and Jew.

Enforcement of the National Socialist outlook might indeed lead to a conflict with the Christian outlook (this was in reply to the clear argument of the Churches that the Christian faith is in fact totalitarian!). But if the Christian Church would confine itself to its own sphere these conflicts would be avoided.

Church Membership Increases

The year book of the Dutch reformed churches in Holland announces that the number of church members has increased during 1942 by over 11,000. The Dutch Reformed Church Council has resolved to hold double morning and afternoon services in the Breeplein, Rotterdam South, owing to the increasing shortage of seats. This provides 1,400 more seats. Double services are already being held in the Putscheplein.

THE PRESENT SITUATION IN THE NORWEGIAN CHURCH

British readers may find it difficult to retain the thread of the long-continued Norwegian Church conflict. Our object in this bulletin is not to enumerate an interminable list of incidents, but to enable Christians outside Norway to grasp the main outline of the struggle, which is of such importance in the movement of spiritual resistance to Hitlerism and has a reflex bearing on the whole work of the Church in Europe to-day.

The principal features of the picture as we see it at present are: (1) repeated incidents in the parishes which show the acute conflict between the majority of the clergy and lay people on the one hand and the small number of Quisling clergy and Church officials on the other; (2) petulant criticism of the Church in the Quisling press, itself perhaps the best witness to the strength of the spiritual resistance; (3) clumsy efforts on the part of the Quisling church authorities to extricate themselves from a position which is becoming more and more difficult.

Parish Incidents

We mention a few recent typical incidents from the Norwegian parishes.

Quisling bishops found it almost impossible to obtain access to church records, and began to appear in the parishes accompanied by State police. Resistance to this measure was so acute that the Quislings have now equipped the bishops themselves with police warrants, and one such was recently used in Oslo by Quisling-bishop Froyland when visiting the office of a parish registrar.

The first clear case of the resignation of a Quisling dean is recorded from Oslo. After the sermon in Uranienborg church on February 7th, the newly appointed Quisling dean informed the congregation that he was dissociating himself from the State church and in future would accept orders only from the former Bishops. The incident has made a deep impression in Oslo Church circles.

One further incident, in itself trivial, but showing how this struggle touches every branch of parish life, comes from the parish of Dovre. A leading woman member of the congregation had embroidered an altar cloth for the church, but when the Quisling authorities expelled the lawful clergyman and appointed a Quisling parson in his place she took back the altar cloth. The story has a grim consequence, as she was promptly arrested and has been sent to Oslo.

Petulant Press Criticism

The Quisling papers *Aftenposten* and *Fritt Folk* continue to pour out their abuse of the Church. Thus a writer in *Fritt Folk* (January 23rd) writes:

"The Church seems to have a special power of attracting men who will not take the trouble to think, or who cannot understand the New Era. In church they get 'comfort,' hoping that God will deliver the country from the 'oppressors.' No wonder, therefore, that political indications in sermons are as numerous as raisins in Christmas cake in the old days. It is incredible how much can be said openly at this time, when people are discussing the 'dictatorship' and the martyrdom of the Church. No wonder, then, that preaching lacks spirit and inspiration, when the Gospel is utilised as a political means of agitation, and as a weapon for attacking political antagonists. What are the results of the preachers' activity? An army of 'saved' people who resemble a wall against the ideas of the New Era, an army of reactionary people who, in their struggle against the men and women of the New Era, often use means which are unworthy of a common man, not to mention a Christian."

Aftenposten for January 16th attacks the clergy for refusing to marry couples in the present equivocal legal situation. In a hypocritical paragraph the paper rebukes the clergy for "rejecting members of the congregation from the Church at such an event in their lives." Actually what the clergy have been doing is refusing to conduct the formal ceremony, as they feel this is a function which they cannot perform, having resigned from the State Church. They are, however, taking a purely religious ceremony of blessing the married couples, and this is described by the Quisling paper as "a sop to a bad conscience, when dissentient priests bring themselves to give a blessing *post festum*, as a sort of substitute for the holy ceremony."

Tortuous Quisling Tactics

The great declaration read in Norway churches on January 17th (see *Spiritual Issues* No. 169) naturally created some reaction from the Quisling authorities. After it had been read it was confiscated in many churches by the police. Two signatories (one of whom was Professor Hallesby) were summoned later for police examination. They were allowed to return home, but the police followed them and registered their property for confiscation. The third signatory has been told that he will be similarly dealt with.

The Quisling bishops had a conference from January 25th to 27th: Quisling was to preside over its last meeting. After their meeting they issued a communique lauding the attitude of the Quisling government. They made the following statement, clearly designed to undermine the resistance of the Norwegian Church:

"Thanks to the positive attitude of our national leadership towards the Church and Christianity, the preaching of the Gospel about the mercy of God, and the crucifixion of Jesus Christ our Saviour, could be conducted as freely as before.

"When the authorities were obliged to interfere against certain clergymen, this was solely due to the abuse they had made of their position in order to conduct political activity. No-one has been or will be dismissed for the sake of his Christian beliefs or for preaching the Gospel. The so-called Temporary Church Leadership by means of continued illegal activity attempted to arouse unrest in the congregations, and in certain cases, sad to say, the attempt succeeded. The pressure and mental terror has been exercised against loyal clergymen and members of the congregation, the majority of

whom, however, so far have remained faithful to their conviction. Luckily many signs now indicate that the people of the Norwegian Church are wearying of agitation; they realise that the attitude of the Church opposition is untenable and unchristian. The wish for peace within the Church is daily growing stronger, and no one wishes it more than we bishops. If the breach established by the Church opposition could be bridged, it would have blessed consequences, both for our Church and our country. Our Church leadership has repeatedly declared its willingness to negotiate with the opposition and has actively showed this willingness to reach conciliation. It is our fervent hope and our prayer that the new year will be a year of peace and reconciliation for our Church, our people and the entire world."

Informed Norwegian circles are convinced that the new Quisling efforts towards reconciliation are doomed to failure. The "Norwegian Church Leadership" is expected to demand the complete freedom of Bishop Berggrav before any negotiations are opened up. One Quisling proposal is that the great bulk of Norway's clergy should be declared "free church clergymen in unorganised free church congregations." Quisling congregational councils, however, may allow such private individuals to use the churches if they ask for special permission. The civil duties of the clergy would then be discharged by Quislingites. This solution is really nothing more than a description of the present state of affairs, and the Quisling government may be trying to regain some measure of authority for its own decisions by issuing an order, the fulfilment of which is to some extent guaranteed.

PRAYER FOR RUSSIA: Church Leaders' Appeal

The following statement on Prayer for Russia has been issued by the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Moderator of the Church of Scotland, and the Moderator of the Free Church Federal Council:—

"At this time when we are watching with grateful admiration the achievements of the Russian Army it is natural and right that people in this country should find some means of paying their tribute to such brave Allies. In association with that tribute

Christians will wish to pray for the people and Church of Russia. We suggest accordingly that on Sunday, February 21st, as we pray for our nation and its Allies, special intercession should be offered for Russia, for its Church, its whole people, and its armies, and for all who suffer in heroic resistance to the aggressor." Signed: William Cantuar, C. W. G. Taylor, Moderator, Church of Scotland, John S. Whale, Moderator, Free Church Federal Council.

The following statement has been issued by Cardinal Hinsley: "By direction of the Pope, we pray publicly every day specially for Russia. The heroic defence of her people against the violators of their country adds intensity to our petitions."—A. Cardinal Hinsley, Archbishop of Westminster.

NEW VENTURE BY UNITED CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIPS

A feature of religious life in wartime Britain has been the development of a number of Christian Fellowships, each aimed at bringing together British Christians and members of Continental Churches who are permanently resident or are refugees in England. Their aim is to bring their members together in Christian friendship for corporate study, action and prayer.

In connection with these Fellowships United Intercession Services have been arranged under the auspices of the British Council of Churches, at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, Trafalgar Square (by kind permission of the Vicar), on the last Thursday in each month from February to July. They will begin at 1.30 p.m. and last for twenty minutes, and will be conducted by ministers of Continental and English churches.

The first service, on February 25th, will be conducted by the Anglo-Scandinavian Christian Fellowship represented by the Provost of Portsmouth, the Very Rev. E. N. Porter Goff, and the Pastor of the Swedish Church in London, the Rev. Carl Söderberg. On March 25th the Anglo-Dutch Christian Fellowship will supervise the service represented by the Dutch Pastor, the Rev. J. van Dorp, and the Rev. J. Moffet, who is Secretary of this Fellowship.

Further services representative of the other Fellowships will follow later in the spring and summer.